



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

University  
Secretary's  
Office.

## The Council, 6 February 2017

### Report of the Senate

**Date:** 14 December 2016  
**Chair:** The Vice-Chancellor  
**Secretary:** Dr A West

#### 1. Vice-Chancellor's report

- 1.1 The Vice-Chancellor presented his report, including:
  - 1.2 Higher Education and Research Bill: The Bill has been debated in both Houses of Parliament and attracted extensive criticism from the House of Lords but to date only Government amendments had been approved. The University continues to proactively engage in lobbying activity alongside other groups, including the Council for the Defence of British Universities.
  - 1.3 Teaching Excellence Framework: The Teaching Excellence Framework remains strongly resisted by the sector on the basis that the current proposal, despite some improvements, would actually measure outputs and not excellence and concerns that the final product would not take into account the wider public benefit of university education. The Vice-Chancellor is leading external engagement on the matter through external groups and significant media presence. The PVC Learning and Teaching and the Director of Strategy, Planning and Change are actively supporting internal and external efforts to shape the TEF, including liaison through the Russell Group and working with the Students' Union. However, there is little Government appetite to make significant changes. It is worrying that institutional TEF outcomes may be used to restrict recruitment of overseas students, which would have a potentially disastrous impact on some outstanding institutions due to the distorting effect of the current measures that were used.
  - 1.4 International Matters: In the current climate international staff and student mobility is potentially the University's most significant challenge. In an era of real-terms reductions in public funding for both teaching and research, universities are increasingly reliant on overseas student fees to support expenditure on facilities and to sustain courses in addition to the demonstrable academic and wider economic and cultural benefits that overseas students brought to the UK. Government rhetoric and consultation on international student numbers supports its broader aim to reduce net migration, which is both misguided and unhelpful. It is especially concerning to note that the Home Office is considering reducing overseas student numbers by up to as many as two thirds, despite intense lobbying both from within and outside Government. Widespread media coverage of this issue in key countries such as India and China poses a significant risk to international student recruitment and is exacerbated by negative perceptions of the UK following the EU Referendum.

1.5 Institutional Response: The University is undertaking extensive lobbying and awareness raising about the importance of international mobility. The re-launched #weareinternational campaign has been widely supported from the HE and other sectors. Students' Unions were closely involved, as is the NUS, which had issued a timely statement reiterating the enormous benefits of international students to the UK. The University is working closely with the local Chamber of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and Institute of Directors. More specifically, the University had been successful in building on existing overseas partnerships in teaching, research and global student mobility whilst continuing to proactively investigate new opportunities. The meeting of Senate in March would be held at AMRC to enable Members to better understand its work and to consider wider opportunities.

1.6 Planning and Finances: The Vice-Chancellor thanked colleagues for their efforts to date in considering how to prioritise resources whilst minimising any impact on service delivery. Senate was reminded that the University had still been successful in a number of areas, for example increasing research income to record levels during 2015/16. Attention was drawn to the work of the Strategy Delivery Group: supporting faculties and professional services to effectively manage staff costs and a parallel review of the University's capital expenditure plans. It was suggested that priority might be given to capital projects that would ultimately reduce running costs. It would also be necessary to review the proportions of staff costs and capital expenditure relative to income. Previous capital plans were predicated on income growth that is now unlikely to be realistic, but there remains a need for facilities that are fit for purpose and meet academic needs.

Academic concerns are at the forefront of SDG decision-making and extend to ensuring that there is no adverse impact on the overall student experience, including pastoral and well-being support. Senate will receive a further update in due course. In addition, a UEB-HoDs Away Day on 9 January included a related discussion, in particular about how to ensure that departments could be supported to consider the management of costs in the longer-term without detriment to ambition and delivery of excellence.

1.7 Student Recruitment: It is crucial that the University recruits appropriate numbers of the best quality students. Led by the PVC Learning and Teaching and informed by previous efforts, colleagues involved in recruitment, marketing and planning are working to ensure that the University maximises its strengths and demonstrates to applicants the benefits of studying and living in Sheffield. Colleagues are encouraged to ensure that relevant departmental staff respond promptly and with care to admissions queries and ensure the exceptional quality of online information and Open Days.

1.8 The Year Ahead: The University enters 2017 faced with a number of uncertainties, all of which will continue to present challenges and demand a constructive and proactive response. The likely implementation of Article 50 following the EU Referendum will have significant impact due to the number of colleagues and students with friends, family and colleagues from across Europe. The impact of Brexit on staff morale and long-term potential drain of talent away from the UK has been a prominent issue for the Russell Group. It is anomalous that the Government continued to celebrate the relative global strength of UK HE given that it is largely dependent on the contributions of international staff and students in collaboration with their UK peers. Implementation of the HE and Research Bill will affect the University one way or another, requiring careful and informed action. The inclusion of students in the political debate about immigration, wider economic concerns and global developments, notably the inauguration of the US President-elect, will all

have an institutional impact. Nevertheless, the University faces these challenges with confidence in its ability to seek opportunities and maximise its strengths, irrespective of circumstance.

## **2. Report of the Council**

- 2.1 Senate received a report on the meetings of Council held on 17 October and 28 November 2016.

## **3. Reports of committees**

### **3.1 Committees of Senate**

Senate approved the reports of the following committees:

- (a) Learning and Teaching Committee  
(Meeting held 22 November 2016 )
- (i) National Student Survey Results 2016: Senate endorsed the actions planned in response to the results of the National Student Survey 2016. Overall satisfaction remained strong at 89% but a series of actions were proposed to support departments in a holistic manner to address persistent issues and further enhance performance. From 2017 the NSS will include additional questions focusing on student engagement. A potential NUS-led student boycott of the 2017 NSS, in protest at its proposed use as a measure in the TEF - and therefore a means to increase tuition fees, is a significant risk to institutional TEF performance. The University continues to liaise with the Students' Union on the matter, it is likely that if a boycott did occur then historic NSS data would be used in the TEF.
- (ii) New and Significantly amended programmes approved by Faculties since 21 September 2016: Senate approved the new, significantly amended, suspended and discontinued programmes approved by Faculties since 21 September.
- (iii) Amendments to the General Regulations: Senate approved changes to the General Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research relating to admission as a staff candidate.
- (iv) Collaborative Partnerships: Senate endorsed the approval of agreements for renewing collaborative partnerships in 2016-17.
- (v) Other Matters:
- Senate noted the development of an institutional vision for learning and teaching spaces, including plans to link into wider work on use of space and estates developments.
  - A draft policy and minimum expectations relating to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) were also noted, in support of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, together with the establishment of a VLE oversight group led by the Directors of Digital Learning.
  - Senate noted the establishment of a working group to develop supporting guidance and resources for staff about the use of lecture capture, following previous approval of a policy to make this an institutional norm.

- (b) Research and Innovation Committee  
(Meeting held on 16 November 2016)

Senate noted extensive preparatory work to raise awareness and support staff in order to maximise the opportunities of the Global Challenges Research Fund. Actions in response to the institutional REF stock-take were being developed and prioritised following detailed analysis and communication.

- (c) Research Ethics Committee  
(Meeting held on 2 November 2016)

Senate approved a new University Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participant, Personal Data and Human Tissue. The updated policy had been developed following a lengthy and detailed review and consultation and would be supported by a dedicated website. Senate also noted continued work to review the University's online ethics application system.

- (d) Senate Budget Committee  
(Meetings held on 17 November 2016)

Senate noted that SBC had met the Deputy Vice-Chancellor to discuss the Strategy Delivery Group and would be holding a further meeting in January. The Committee had discussed the financial statements and financial forecasts 2015/16-2019/20 and the 2016/17 Budgets as well as analysis of 2016 student recruitment and a briefing on the 2016/17 planning round.

### **3.2 Other committees**

Senate received for information the reports of the Finance Committee (meeting held on 17 October 2016), Estates Committee (meeting held on 11 October 2016), Health and Safety Committee (meeting held on 24 October 2016), and the Human Resources Committee (meeting held on 21 September 2016), which were approved by Council at its meeting on 28 November 2016. Senate also received the following annual reports 2015-16: the Library; Appeals Committee of Senate relating to Progress of Students; Discipline Committee and Disciplinary Appeals Committee; Cases reviewed externally by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.